

THORNS.

THE Christian world has long been guessing what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. I have a book that in ten pages tries to show what Paul's thorn was *not*, and in another ten pages tries to show what it *was*.

Many of the theological doctors have felt Paul's pulse to see what was the matter with him. I suppose that the reason he did not tell us what it was may have been because he did not want us to know. He knew that if he stated what it was there would have been a great many people from Corinth bothering him with prescriptions as to how he might cure it.

Some say it was diseased eyes, some that it was a humped back. It may have been neuralgia. Perhaps it was gout, although his active habits and a sparse diet throw doubt on the supposition. Suffice it to say it was a thorn—that is, it stuck him. It was sharp.

It was probably of not much account in the eyes of the world. It was not a trouble that could be compared to a lion or a boisterous sea. It was like a thorn that you may have in your hand or foot and no one know it. Thus we see that it becomes a type of those little nettlesome worries of life that exasperate the spirit.

Every one has a thorn sticking him. The housekeeper finds it in unfaithful domestics; or an inmate who keeps things disordered; or a house too small for convenience or too large to be kept cleanly. The professional man finds it in perpetual interruptions or calls for "more copy." The Sabbath-school teacher finds it in inattentive scholars, or neighbouring teachers that talk loud and make a great noise in giving a little instruction.

One man has a rheumatic joint which, when the wind is north-east, lifts the storm signal. Another a business partner who takes full half the profits, but does not help earn them. These trials are the more nettlesome, because, like Paul's thorn, they are not to be mentioned. Men get sympathy for broken bones and mashed feet, but not for the end of sharp thorns that have been broken off in the fingers.

Let us start out with the idea that we must have annoyances. It seems to take a certain number of them to keep us humble, wakeful, and prayerful. To Paul the thorn was as disciplinary as the shipwreck. If it is not one thing, it is another. If the stove does not smoke, the boiler must leak. If the pen is good, the ink must be poor. If the editorial column be able, there must be a typographical blunder. If the thorn does not pierce the knee, it must take you in the back. Life must have sharp things in it. We cannot make up our robe of Christian character without pins and needles.

We want what Paul got—grace to bear these things. Without it we become cross, censorious, and irascible. We get in the habit of sticking our thorns into other people's fingers. But, God helping us, we place these annoyances in the category of the "all things that work together for good." We see how much shorter these thorns are than the spikes that struck through the palms of Christ's hands; and remembering that He had on His head a whole crown of thorns, we take to ourselves the consolation that if we suffer with Him on earth we shall be glorified with Him in heaven.

But how could Paul positively rejoice in these infirmities? I answer that the school of Christ has three classes of scholars. In the *first class* we learn how to be stuck with thorns without losing our patience. In the *second class* we learn how to make the sting positively advantageous. In the *third class* of this school we learn how even to rejoice in being pierced and wounded; but that is the *senior class*, and when we get to that, we are near graduation into glory.—*Around the Tea-table.*

DECISION FOR CHRIST.

BY REV. W. HUDSON.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."—JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

THOSE who follow this advice add themselves to the list of witnesses for Christ and His gospel. By full decision for His will and service a man becomes a sign among his fellows. Many as are those who bear the name of Christ, when any one becomes fully decided he must attract attention by those features of his conduct which so

clearly and broadly distinguish him from merely nominal Christians. According to the supposition, he in all affairs maintains his principles, finding in Christianity what is abundantly sufficient to direct all his commercial and other conduct, and using that divine grace which enables him to turn into practice what he knows of duty to God and men. Are such men so many that one such can easily be lost in the mass? No, indeed. The man of full and absolute decision is one among many, and is easily found. He is a star of the first magnitude among numerous smaller orbs; and men must see him while they walk in the light which streams from his Christian life.

Happily for the world there are a few such scattered about in many and various places, that all people may see the sign which God has set up in mercy and compassion to mankind. Some may affect not to see this sign; but how, in these days and in such a community as this of England, can any one live and look about at all, without discerning it? He may misinterpret what he sees; for it has a divine meaning which many do not like. Its presence shows what men may become; rebukes all who know that the Gospel is the power of God, and yet feel it only in the most partial degree; and reproves and condemns the lives of such as seek not the Lord at all.

Then let me exhort you to seek the great favour of belonging to the vast continuous line of witnesses for Christ. You have in your intelligence a Divine gift, bestowed for a purpose of which you are not able to plead ignorance. You have a conscience which often speaks within you in strong and certain tones, demanding that you should be self-consistent, that you should do the will of God, and that you should fulfil the conditions of service to the generation to which you belong. You possess a free will whose creative decisions, recorded in the time of your moral probation, will stamp your character, and fix your endless doom; and you have no time which can safely be wasted. Do not abuse your intelligence and power of choice; do not so treat your conscience that it will become as flesh scared with a hot iron; and do not think of crowding the work of life, and, therefore, of a lifetime, into the corner of a few months or days, as many have presumed to do, with, it is feared, the most disappointing and fearful results. Be in earnest to know God's will and do it, and then there will be given to you the most effectual Divine impression and teaching. Be determined to stand in proper relations to God, and you will not long be in any doubt as to those relations; for spiritual discernment will be granted you. Be decided, and you will be greatly blessed yourself, and made a blessing to those who know you, and who feel your power. If you take this advice you will this day perform a moral action, involving the most glorious results, an action which you will never find any cause to regret, and the benefits of which will increase through eternal ages.

Go out beneath the arched heaven in night's profoundest gloom, and say if you can, "There is no God." Pronounce the dreadful blasphemy, and each star above you will reprove you for your darkness of intellect—every voice that floats upon the night will bewilder your utter helplessness and despair. Is there no God? Who, then, unrolled the blue scroll, and threw open its bright frontispiece, the legible gleamings of immortality? Who fashioned the green earth with perpetual rolling waters, and its lovely expanse of island and main? Who gave the eagle a stately ery, when the tempest swells and beats strongest to the minstrelsy of her moan? Who made light pleasant to thee and darkness a covering and a herald of the first flash of morning? Who gave to thee that matchless symmetry of sinews and limbs, the irrepressible daring of ambition, passion, and love? And yet the thunders of heaven, and the waters of earth, are chained. They remain, but the bow of reconciliation hangs out above and beneath them.

When we are fullest of heavenly love, we are best fitted to bear with human infirmity, to live above it, and forget its burden. It is the absence of love to Christ, not its fulness, that makes us so impatient of the weaknesses and inconsistencies of our Christian brethren. Then, when Christ is all our portion, when He dwells with us and in us, we have so satisfying an enjoyment of His perfection that the imperfection of others is as it were swallowed up, and the sense of our own nothingness makes us sensible to that which is irritating to individual feelings and habits.—*Ilare.*